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February 28, 2018

FILED IN CHARLES CITY  
U.S. BANKRUPTCY COURT  
2018 FEB 28 A. 10:59  
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Dear Judge Volk,

SOUTHERN DISTRICT  
WEST VIRGINIA

I respectfully request that you preserve what I consider to be the core values of the Charleston Gazette and its staff, and the former Daily Mail, for the benefit of the Kanawha Valley and the state as a whole. I realize my voice may be unique in representing the values of both of these papers. They have both been integral to my life for many decades, and to the life of my family going back even further. I could probably write a short book about this history, but I am including only some of the highlights in this letter. These values and experiences go well beyond the monetary value of the paper. From my point of view, both papers are part of the heart and soul of our community and our state. We need to find an owner and publisher who is committed to protecting the best of both papers, regardless of the amount of their monetary bid.

The core values of both papers include the following:

Sustained outrage.

Deep and critical thinking.

Caring for our people and our surroundings and working to protect them.

High standards of quality in telling the story through words and photographs.

An appropriate level of quirkiness.

Current staff at the Gazette-Mail embody these values as best they can in a very difficult and uncertain environment. Some of their best work is nationally recognized, as you know, including Pulitzer prizes to both of the papers. Alumni of both papers have gone on to prominent positions in journalism and other professions throughout the country.

The very fact of having two papers, and then the various combinations we have seen during the last several years, has been a demonstration of the democratic process that is still alive and well in our state. Mountaineers are always free – to choose how we think and act and what we believe. We can love and respect each other without regard to our varying views. The two papers, and then the two editorial pages, reflect this fact of our lives.

Each of us has our own unique history with one or another, or both, of the papers. Following are some of the highlights of my own history, and that of my family.

-My father was a pioneering environmentalist in air pollution control who taught at WVU. He considered himself to be a friend of Ned Chilton. I have copies of articles and some original political cartoons that document the coverage the Gazette gave to

him and his issues. In 1984, Skip Johnson, who I was car-pooling with at the time, wrote a beautiful eulogy for my father as one of the last of the era of "cage-rattlers."

-I inherited a passion for print journalism. The Gazette has been my go-to paper for news, commentary, photojournalism, and cartoons for most of my adult life. I have contributed letters to the editor, op eds, and photographs, and provided input informally, from time to time throughout this period. My own work as a photographer, editor, and FestivALL art fair producer was also covered in the paper.

-Beginning in the 90s, when I began interacting directly with the state legislature as a professional social worker and planner, the reporting coverage by the Daily Mail became an indispensable source of news about what was happening at the Capitol. I also provided information to reporters from both papers as requested by my agency.

-In the early 2000s, my younger son began working as a Flipside reporter, a movie critic, and an occasional feature writer for the Gazette. At WVU he worked with the Daily Athenaeum. After graduation, he became the full-time education reporter for a year and then a statehouse reporter for three and a half years for the Daily Mail. He went on to work at the national and then the large metro levels, where he is now.

-After I retired from the state, in 1999, I spent fourteen months delivering the afternoon Daily Mail, and the Sunday Gazette, to customers along a 125-mile route in three rural counties. This experience gave me an intimate insight into what the papers, then available only in print, meant to hundreds of people in these three counties.

-In the interests of full disclosure, I have also used both papers for other purposes, such as mulching the garden, wrapping and cushioning packages, soaking up spills, washing windows, etc. I recognize that the content of the papers hasn't mattered in these instances, except that the Sunday funnies can make a good wrapping paper.

I imagine it is a daunting task and a huge responsibility to make a decision that has such deep and lasting effects on individuals like me and on whole communities. I know there is so much more that a paper can be, with the various platforms we have now. In some way its role may be diminished by the unlimited alternatives for getting news.

In other ways the role of a trusted paper, built on core values, is more important than ever. The basic elements of professional journalism remain the same. Telling the truth to power still requires courage, caring, and commitment, as well as professional values and skills. I have seen evidence of these qualities in both papers over a long period of time.

Please do whatever you can to find the best possible owner and publisher to protect and build on the great legacies of our beloved papers.

Thank you for your attention to this letter. I plan to share this message with whoever might be interested in reading it and to encourage others to write you also.

Respectfully yours, *Betty Rivard*  
Betty Rivard  
2017 recipient of the Don Marsh Award for Public Service, WV Citizens Action Group